

Oral History

of

Willard E. (Bill) Nelson

Date of Interview: March 6, 2008

Location of Interview: Tigard, Oregon

Interviewer: Jerry C. Grover

Approximate years worked for Fish and

Wildlife Service: 33 ½ total - 1947 to September 1975 with FWS

Offices and Field Stations Worked, Positions Held:

Hired as a wildlife biologist (GS 4) in a predator farm rodent position in Coos County; Portland (GS 7) in charge of rat work crews, moved to Pioneer Post Office building and given a sub-district in northwestern Oregon; moved to Bend in 1954 and given the central district as (GS 9); back to Portland in 1956. In 1965 was promoted to State Supervisor for the Predator and Rodent Control program, a position he held until he retired in September of 1975

Most Important Projects:

Rat and mouse control after Vanport flood and controlling bear, mountain lion and coyote populations, gopher and mouse depredation control on Forest Service lands, initiating the cooperative reimbursement program with the states, counties and private sector, and gaining Federal benefits for field employees.

Colleagues and Mentors:

Bill Gussie, Jack Berryman, Leo Lathe, John Gottschalk, Ham Hansen and Bill Rider.

Most Important Issues:

Dealing with animal rights people and the budget.

Brief Summary of Interview:

Born on January 12, 1920, Mr. Nelson grew up in a logging camp. His father ran a loader for a lumber company and moved several times during his childhood. He went to Oregon State on a track scholarship but with

one term left to go in college he joined the Navy and was decorated for his actions in the South Pacific. Upon return home, he married and finished his biology degree in Fish and Game Management. Mr. Nelson talks about the fun times like having shooting and horse shoe contests at meetings and a little about his time in D.C. He also talks about what he feels were the most pressing issues at the time, changes that have occurred in the Service with the lack of 1080 and getting computers right when he was retiring. He mentions highlights of his career and just talks about some of the fun times he went out with various hunters to do predator control.



Bill and Alice Nelson, March 2008

Oral History Program
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
National Conservation Training Center
Shepherdstown, West Virginia

THE ORAL HISTORY

Jerry: This is Jerry Grover a retired Ecological Services & Fishery supervisor in the Portland Regional. I'm doing an oral history today with Bill Nelson regarding his career with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The purpose of this interview is part of a program to preserve the heritage and culture of the U. S. Fish & Wildlife Service through the eyes of its employees. With me today is Alice Nelson and Judy Grover. Would you state your name for the record.

Willard: Willard Earnest Nelson. I also go by the name Bill. And I was born in 1920, nine miles south of Bend in eastern Oregon at the foot of Lava Butte in a logging camp. That winter there was four feet of snow on Highway 97 and my mother and I went to the hospital in Bend on the logging train.

Jerry: Gosh that makes you 88 years old Bill. When you retired from the Fish and Wildlife Service, what was your position?

Willard (Bill): I was the State Supervisor for the State of Oregon for Animal Damage Control. We had nearly all of the counties in the state in the program. And at one time we had 51 hunters working for us in four districts. The district around Portland was the northwest district, we had a southwest district, a central district and a far eastern

district and an assistant district agent in each of those districts.

Jerry: When did you retire Bill?

Willard (Bill): I Retired in September of 1975. That's a long time ago. I retired with over 33 years of Federal service and have now been retired for over 33 years.

Jerry: Yes it is. Well let's begin with your early life south of Bend. What did your parents do?

Willard (Bill): Well my dad ran the log loader for Brooks-Scanlon Lumber Company. It was a railroad loader, all the cars went under the loader and he loaded them with a boom from a cold deck and sent them on to the mill in Bend.

We were living in company housing and while I was there, we moved one time from Lava Butte to Bessie Butte Camp. They just picked the houses up, set them on flat cars and took them and unloaded them where they wanted. Set up a town in a day and that's where we lived and we had a double house. There was a school there in a boxcar which also served as a church, although I don't remember many people going to church in those days out there.

Our family moved when I was five years old from the logging camp to what was then Carol Acres south of Bend. We built a house and had fourteen acres, raised a little hay, had too many cows to milk. I went to school there in a one-room schoolhouse that had five grades in it. Use to get in trouble because we could get under the schoolhouse and we could also get up on top to block the chimney of the wood-burning stove.

Jerry: Let's go back, you said that that they moved the town when you went to Bessie Butte, that they just picked it up and put it on a flat car and set up the town in one day.

Did you have running water, had they made provisions for a well or did you have outhouses or?

Willard (Bill): All outhouses. They had running water in spigots. They brought in a tank car of water and ran a pipeline down through the center of the houses and put two or three stand pipes on it. In the spring, summer and fall, all was fine. In the winter it all froze up.

Jerry: Okay. The schoolhouse; did you have brother and sisters?

Willard (Bill): I have three sisters, two older and one younger. And we all, well all but my youngest sister, started out schooling in either in the logging camp or in Carol Acres school. My youngest sister attended one of the schools in Bend in the first year it was built.

Jerry: You said you moved to Carol Acres you had fourteen acres there and cows. It was your job to milk?

Willard (Bill): I milked the cows because my dad was gone from Sunday night till Friday night every week. Logging!

Jerry: Then was the school nearby?

Willard (Bill): Oh yeah, it was in walking distance. In fact my teacher lived with us so whenever I had to stay after school I had company going home.

Jerry: Did you get into hunting and fishing at that time?

Willard (Bill): Well when I was fourteen, I think, I shot my first deer—with a 30.30 rifle that I bought from Montgomery Ward for \$22.50.

Jerry: That's a lot of money in those days.

Willard (Bill): It was! And my dad did some wood cutting for a fellow and he paid my dad with a shotgun. I had my choice between a pair of shotguns. I was fourteen when I got a shotgun so I started hunting ducks that same year.

Jerry: In those other early years, did have any hobbies or what else did you do, just school, milking cows and?

Willard (Bill): That's about it. I had an early morning paper route for about 2 years, the *News Telegram*, when I was 12. I trapped muskrats along the Deschutes River in the Fall. I sold the cased hides to Montgomery Ward; 50¢ a pelt. Hunting and fishing, we did a lot of fishing.

Jerry: When you fished, was it in the Deschutes River?

Willard (Bill): My dad was a purist fly fishermen and nearly every weekend we were over on the Deschutes River during the season. And I grew up as a purist but then they developed spinning rods and that did me in.

Jerry: High school, was high school there too?

Willard (Bill): High school is in Bend and there was no bus service. We walked a mile and a half to school everyday and back and until I got old enough to get a driver's license. And then I drove my neighbor's car and their kids to school everyday.

Jerry: Did you study anything in particular in high school?

Willard (Bill): Just the regular reading and writing and arithmetic programs. I played football two years and—the coach then was a fellow named Nicholson. I never was very heavy, 125 pounds or so. He said, "You better quit this and go out for track." So I did. In 1937 and '38 I won the half-mile at the Oregon State meets.

Jerry: Did you go on to the University from there or the Army?

Willard (Bill): I went to Oregon State University on a track scholarship (chuckling). And spent three years and two terms at Oregon State and then joined the Navy. I had one term to go to graduate when I joined the Navy.

Jerry: And that would have been about World War II time.

Willard (Bill): Yes. 1942 was when I joined.

Jerry: Where were you stationed?

Willard (Bill): I went through basic training at San Diego. My job at Oregon State on the track scholarship was in the training room so they put me right in the hospital corps. I came out of Navy basic training as a 1st Class Hospital Corpsmen. Went to surgery school and came out of there a Pharmacist Mate 3rd Class. Transferred to San Bernardino with an outfit and then they transferred that whole outfit to the 4th Marine Division. So went back to San Diego and went through Marine basic training [the 2nd time], from there on to Hawaii. The 4th Marine Division was headquartered on Maui and from there we went to Saipan and Tinian and then to Iwo Jima. On all of them.

Jerry: ...you were at the landing on Iwo Jima?

Willard (Bill): Yes (chuckling). Yeah! I don't know how I rated it but I got an individual citation from Schmidt who was the commanding general for the Marine Corps on Iwo Jima.

Jerry: Okay the citation, what was the context?

Willard (Bill): Just a citation because of the duty I performed there.

Jerry: You were still doing corpsmen duties at that time.

Willard (Bill): Yes, as a surgical assistant.

Jerry: Where'd you go after Saipan and Iwo Jima?

Willard (Bill): We went back to Maui and then we were on our way to Japan when the war ended. The 4th Marine Division. we just kept going, went into Sasabo on the southern isle of Kyushu and was there two months and came home.

Jerry: Home being San Diego then or Hawaii?

Willard (Bill): San Diego. They tried to get us off in all the ports along the coast and we finally ended up clear back in San Diego. Got on a train, came back to Portland.

Jerry: Did you go back to school?

Willard (Bill): During the War the last job you held before you went in the Service you had to be rehired to after you got back. Well I'd worked for the Forest Service and so they hired me to help build a road down to the Metolius River and in the winter of 1945. And so I worked on that till March 1946 and then Alice and I were married and I went back spring term to Oregon State.

Jerry: So when did, where did Alice come into the picture?

Willard (Bill): Oh about 1940 when we were in college. I knew her there and we corresponded. We weren't really an item but we corresponded all during World War II. I came back and found out she was the one I wanted to marry.

Jerry: Any children?

Willard (Bill): We had two daughters; Kathy Jean and Joyce Ann. Both are married and each have two sons so we have four grandsons two of which are married and one has a daughter so we have a great granddaughter.

Jerry: Are they living in the Portland area?

Willard (Bill): Yes they're in the Portland area; we see them often.

Jerry: When, when did you marry Alice?

Willard (Bill): 1946. So this Sunday the ninth of March will be our 62nd wedding anniversary.

Jerry: Okay. You and Alice went back to school for the spring term at Oregon State.

Willard (Bill): Yes. I went back for the spring term and lived in a two story house with bathroom privileges and breakfast privileges that spring term. Then that summer I built a house on Grant Street in Corvallis and we lived in it. I went to school another year.

Jerry: How were you able to build a house? I mean that's kind of expensive for a college kid.

Willard (Bill): Well it wasn't at the time you know. It was a little two bedroom house—I think it cost us about \$3,000 dollars for the whole thing.

Jerry: What was your course of study at Oregon State?

Willard (Bill): Fish and Game Management. We had a lot forestry subjects, I was a little undecided for quite a while as to which way to go because I worked for the Forest Service in the summers while I was going to school. I was a lookout on Cultis Mountain and a lookout on Lava Butte and I did trail work and fire fighting for them also.

Jerry: What channeled you over to end up in wildlife then?

Willard (Bill): Well I finally decided I'd go with the Fish and Game Management rather than forestry.

Jerry: So what was your first job doing with your degree; when did you graduate Bill?

Willard (Bill): 1947. Prior to graduation I took a federal biologist examination and passed it with flying colors. Ham Hansen was the district agent in Portland at the time in the Predator and Rodent Control Program. He came down to Corvallis and interviewed me and hired me for a job in Coos County. It was a farm and city predator rodent position; I was down there just a year doing mostly rat work.

Jerry: What was your grade that you were hired?

Willard (Bill): I believe it was a GS-5 Wildlife Biologist. This program down there was a county health department and Fish and Wildlife Service cooperative program having mainly to do with rat control. But there was other predator control also but very little.

Jerry: What were the problem rats doing?

Willard (Bill): Well they were into everything. Coos Bay and the surrounding area was a seaport and they had a world of rats. In fact every place in town had rats. They were in the houses and all of the buildings. Norway rats. You could go down the street at night in Coos Bay and see the rats in the windows of the grocery stores. They were that plentiful. And the feed stores were losing all kinds of money. It was also a dairy county and they had a lot of feed supplies and they were losing a world of money on rat-contaminated feed.

Eugene Fields was the Coos County Sanitarian and I worked out of his office. Another fellow, Gene Alberts was the Assistant District Agent. We would all go out for morning coffee together and flip coins to see who would buy. Well Fields and I took 4 pennies and ground off the back half of them so that only 4 heads would show, glued them together so as to have 2 normal looking coins with 'heads' on both sides. Albert bought an awful lot of coffee although we would use a regular coin once in a while. Never told him!

Jerry: Was Ham your boss?

Willard (Bill): Ham Hansen was the State boss but I was under an agent named Gene Alberts since I was in his southwestern district.

Jerry: You said that you were there for a year Bill, then where?

Willard (Bill): Well then we had the Vanport flood of the Columbia River and that brought me back to Portland .because the government appropriated some money and gave it to the Fish and Wildlife Service for rat control along the Columbia River. When that flood occurred it put all those rats into the towns along the river and of course it wiped Vanport out, it flooded out entirely.

They brought me back Portland and put me in charge of four, four-man man rat crews. I was the only Service employee in Oregon with rat control experience. We worked from Arlington to Astoria, about 200 miles of Columbia River. We were doing mostly baiting with red squill and at that time 1080 baits, sodium fluoroacetate baits. No trapping at all, it was all baiting.

Jerry: What was red squill, I don't think I've heard of that one?

Willard (Bill): Red squill was a Mediterranean plant that was probably one of the best toxins for rat control and it also had some safety factors because it made dogs vomit if they ate it so they would not be killed by it so it had no secondary impact. It's kind of going out of style now.

Jerry: And the 1080 has been long banned.

Willard (Bill): It's been banned, yeah. Sodium fluoroacetate We used a lot of it and killed lots of rats. We baited all the floating houses in Vanport and up the Willamette River to the edge of Portland. And mostly, you know, trying to bait all the dumps because the rats seemed to head for those garbage dumps. We killed them by the 55-gallon drum full.

Jerry: Did you get a promotion when you came to Portland?

Willard (Bill): Yes, I got a promotion to a GS-7.

Jerry: How long were you in the Vanport project before you moved on?

Willard (Bill): Well, not quite a year. The money ran out for that particular rat control project in about ten months. And Ham moved me into the office in the Pioneer Post Office building and gave me a sub-district in northwestern Oregon. I think I had eight counties.

Jerry: Did that mean a promotion too?

Willard (Bill): Not right at the time, not for another year.

Jerry: Was living pretty good then, I mean money wise. Were you able to from the time at Coos Bay and Vanport, were you and Alice able to live okay?

Willard (Bill): Yeah but mainly because she was a pharmacist. [Laughing] She supplemented the income quite a bit, you know, in those early years. She graduated from Oregon State with a degree in pharmacy. She worked every place we lived. So that helped.

But I worked that eight or nine months in a sub-district here. Then I got a promotion to a GS-9. That gave us a little more. In fact, enough so that I built another house on Gene Road in Tigard right across from where GI Joe's is. We had two and a half acres there. Unfortunately I sold it before GI Joe's got in there. It would be worth a lot more. Both of our daughters were born there.

And then I was moved to Bend and given the central district. This district was for all the central Oregon counties from the Columbia River to California; it was a pretty big district.

Jerry: What year was that?

Willard (Bill): This was in 1954.

Jerry: How many people were in that district that you supervised?

Willard (Bill): I think I had 14 people working for me in that district.

Jerry: What was the focus of your activities at that time?

Willard (Bill): It was predator control. Coyotes, mountain lion, bobcats; very few fox in that area. And mostly for benefit of livestock growers, sheep and cattle growers because they lost some calves in the winter when they calved. We also did some work for the Forest Service and forest animal damage stuff. This led to the Denver Wildlife Research Lab and Nelson Kurvano and Don Spencer. Were you familiar with him?

Jerry: I know their names.

Willard (Bill): Well Nels came up and got us going on that. This was mainly white-footed deer mouse and pocket gopher control there on the forest. We developed a burrow builder so we could intersect the pocket gopher burrows and bait them at the same time with strychnine treated wheat or oats.

Jerry: This equipment, this is something you invented, this burrow builder?

Willard (Bill): We modified the burrow builder so it would do this. All it was a modified sub-soiler that they used in farming. The Forest Service pulled it with a D-8 Caterpillar bulldozer and cleared stuff out of the way as they went. And it was fairly successful.

Jerry: What did you say that was a white-footed mouse? And pocket gophers. What were they doing, I mean they were damaging the young trees or?

Willard (Bill): Well the pocket gophers were damaging the young pine trees. They'd go right down a row of pine trees and pull the little ones into the burrow or come up and eat the bark; they were killing those trees. Of course the white-footed deer mice were picking up all the pine seeds that were available so they were baited with 1080 wheat that was colored green to prevent bird consumption. Two colors repelled the birds - yellow and green. You would think that the birds would eat those colors first but it worked pretty well.

Jerry: Were other areas you worked in?

Willard (Bill): We also got real involved in bear control work for the timber companies in Western Oregon. In fact Longview Fiber, Weyerhaeuser, Georgia Pacific all bought bear traps which they gave to us to do bear control on their

lands. The bear were picking out the fastest growing Douglas fir and peeling the bark and eating the cambium layer of the trees. At one time they figured \$40,000 a year they were losing to bear. And then of course the Bureau banned the bear traps so—that knocked that program out. We used the Aldrich snare in a few places but not as successfully as the traps.

We did some extra predator work for the Oregon Game Commission when the Chucker partridge was introduced in the lower Deschutes River canyon. This was in controlling problem bobcats. Our livestock protection work also benefitted game animals and birds.

On the Hart Mountain Antelope Refuge, we did aerial control mostly on coyotes for the protection of Antelope kids and Sage Grouse.

On Malheur Refuge, we did baiting to control ravens and magpies that were raiding nests of waterfowl and wading birds for their eggs

Jerry: How long did you spend doing that, Bill, there in the central area; how long were you there? Where did you go after that?

Willard (Bill): We moved back to Portland in 1956 as the Assistant District Agent to District Agent Ham Hanson and later, Melvin Smith.

Jerry: And how long were you in that position as the principal assistant?

Willard (Bill): Well—I believe until 1965. And at that time, Mel Smith who was the state supervisor, had a heart attack and passed away. Nelson Elliott promoted me to the state supervisor. And I was in that position until I retired.

Jerry: Okay as state supervisor for Predator and Rodent Control; what grade was that?

Willard (Bill): That was a GS-12.

Jerry: In 1965. So they hadn't changed yet from Predator and Rodent Control to Animal Damage Control

Willard (Bill): It just had gotten to Animal Damage Control.

Jerry: Did that affect you a lot by or was that just a name change?

Willard (Bill): No, just a name change except we had one Regional Director who didn't like Predator Rodent Control and curtailed the program somewhat. I won't name names. He just didn't like us I guess.

Jerry: But anyway you're now Animal Damage Control and nothing really changed, you're still after coyotes, you're still doing bears or whatever with problem species.

Willard (Bill): Yes.

Jerry: Okay now you're the state supervisor, you were in that until retirement, which was when?

Willard (Bill): September 1975.

Jerry: That gave you how many years in the Service?

Willard (Bill): Thirty—well including military and the Forest Service; it gave me 33 ½ years I think.

Jerry: This is in March of 2008; it's 33 ½ years since you retired. That is the same as your working career

Willard (Bill): Right. [chuckling]

Jerry: So you're making money on your retirement.

Willard (Bill): I'm making money on my retirement. Yeah, more than I made when I worked.

Jerry: What did you do after retirement; what have you been doing for these last 33 years?

Willard (Bill): Well initially I took about a year and didn't do anything. And then I went to work with a fellow who worked for the City of Tigard Water Department. And we replaced—main water lines and home lines mainly in King City. All of that Japanese steel that they had put into the ground next to the electrical lines, the steel rotted out via electrolysis, out with lots of leaks. So we replaced those lines; I was glad to get back to doing a little physical labor.

Jerry: Okay so basically you were in contracting work then.

Willard (Bill): Yes, contracting work! Jerry, I should have signed up with a construction company. I did enough construction work to make me eligible for social security. But I didn't do that so [chuckling] I'm not eligible.

Jerry: Let's look back over your career. Is there certain things that you're really proud of, that really just struck you well, or fun times?

Willard (Bill): Fun times—every year that I was a state supervisor; every year we held a training conference for all our employees and those were fun times as well work times. Always had shooting contests and horse shoe contests, ball games and there were always some new ideas thought out by the people who were working, you know, that would improved what we were doing. I guess those were the main fun times.

Although I did spend some time in Washington D.C. and I enjoyed that.

Jerry: On a detail or?

Willard (Bill): Yeah details. I was there six weeks one time and a month at another time. John Gottschalk was the director then and Jack Berryman was the—person in charge of Animal Damage Control; Bill Gussie was his assistant. And that's interesting because I hired Bill Gussie in Oregon as a trapper. He just wanted to be outdoors and he had no training much in biology or anything else that pertained to Animal Damage Control. But he wanted to work and we had a vacancy in the Portland area so we put him to work and he went on from there – and did a good job!

Jerry: I'll be darned. So all of a sudden you run into him back in Washington D.C.?

When you look back, what were some of the most pressing issues, the most difficult issues that you had to deal with? Were politics a big player in that?

Willard (Bill): The animal rights people were always on us. And—budget was always a problem because of these cooperative programs; you know we had money from the State Department's of Agriculture, the Fish and Game people, the counties and the federal government.

Jerry: ...and then you guys did the work!

Willard (Bill): The trappers that we had were not GS people. They were just hires not eligible for retirement or health benefits or anything. Well we started a new program here which we called a reimbursement program. We paid everything from federal funds and then these other outside funds reimbursed us for their share of the costs. In that way we got these trappers into the GS grades

which got them some health insurance and some retirement. Eventually, we even got them into General Services pickup trucks. And I think that was probably the highlight of my career getting them higher wages and health insurance.

Of note, Ruth Knisley who was my office manager and secretary, had the first ideas of the reimbursement program. She received a Federal award for this.

Jerry: On looking back on your career, is there any individual that stands out as being a mentor or one that encouraged you, that got you in for a 33-year career?

Willard (Bill): Two of them. Ham Hanson was one and Bill Rider. He was in the region office and unfortunately he only lived about two years after he came out here. But I spent a lot of time with both of those people and both of them really were encouraging to me; mentored me and helped a lot.

Jerry: You were talking about one of your tours in D.C., one of your temporary assignments, a rat control conference?

Willard (Bill): Yes. I had to set up a rat control conference and we brought our people, the state supervisors, into Washington D.C. But the people on the program were the Secretary of Agriculture and—I don't know what they call it but the animal people in charge of health and human services; they had an assistant secretary there. We had some pretty high-powered people in that conference and it got lots and lots of publicity in the Washington D.C. papers.

Jerry: What was the goal of this conference? What was it suppose to achieve?

Willard (Bill): That I'm not sure, [chuckling] except that it did bring to light the problems particular to the coastal states with rat control program problems. We had, I think there were two private pest control operators on the program—as well as some of our own people. I was on the program; and Milt Carolyn from Texas was on the program. And I think mainly just to bring the attention to the fact that there was a rat problem in probably in all the states.

Jerry: There were a lot of people involved, I would guess.....between state and feds.

Willard (Bill): There were.

Jerry: So what were some of the major changes that you saw in the Fish and Wildlife Service since you started your career?

Willard (Bill): Well some of those major changes were dictated by the Washington office and one of them was a lack of 1080. It was probably was the most selective of any compound we ever used in Animal Damage Control for coyotes.

Jerry: What do you mean by selective. I thought there was the issues here with secondary poisoning?

Willard (Bill): It was the most selective; we only used 1.6 grams of 1080 in solution to 100 pounds of bait. And a coyote only needed a little bit of that to be killed and the chance of secondary poisoning was practically nil.

Jerry: What about non-target species?

Willard (Bill): Even non-target species. We've had both badger and bear fed on those horse carcasses with no ill effects. Eagles couldn't hold enough of that meat to be killed.

Yes, there was just a lot of, a lot of controversy. It was interesting when the Cane report came out. They called all the state supervisors who were using 1080, into Washington D.C. Gave us the Cane report, instructed us on how to read it and comment on it and then prohibited its use in the field. I had two trappers resign as soon as that came out, one in Harney County which is a big, big county and another in Malheur County because they didn't figure they could handle their program without it control coyote damages?

Willard (Bill): Yes.

Jerry: And other top predators, mountain lion and that.

Willard (Bill): Well yeah mountain lion. It had to be a trapper with dogs since the lion had to be treed.

One of the changes that occurred just as I retired was the fact that all of our offices were getting computers. Unfortunately I retired just at that time and so I didn't get the training that my replacement and others got in the use of it.

Jerry: You still maintain contact with folks with the Fish and Wildlife Service. Since you retired, what do you think of the Service?

Willard (Bill): I don't know the current state supervisor well but I knew Tom Nichols well. Since I retired the sheep business has dropped here in Oregon; some of the counties have gone out of the program. So it has decreased in size since I left. We know that the coyote population is way up, the bear and mountain lion populations are high and not much is being done about them.

Jerry: Are there still the depredation issues with these species?

Willard (Bill): Oh yes, oh yes.

Jerry: And how do they handle them now, to your knowledge?

Willard (Bill): Mainly with traps. And even those are controversial. We did some aerial gunning for coyotes but don't know if this program has continued

Jerry: But now this program has been shifted over to the Department of Agriculture?

Willard (Bill): Yes, where it never should have left.

Jerry: Why? Because you were dealing with farmers and ranchers?

Willard (Bill): That's right.

Willard (Bill): Okay and they put it over into Fish and Wildlife Service because we were the biologists or?

Willard (Bill): I guess that's why. Well the largest part of the Fish and Wildlife Service was started in the southwest United States and that mainly in 1932 and it was the Predator and Rodent Control program.

There was a hunter out here in Yamhill County that had the hounds, two or three hounds.

Jerry: What were some the interesting things that happened to you?

Willard (Bill): There was a hunter out in Yamhill County that had a few hounds.

Jerry: This is back in what the middle of your career?

Willard (Bill): His name was K.O. Mullins and he was doing some bear work with dogs. He would tree these bear and then shoot them out of the tree. And I was out one time with him and he treed a half grown bear and these hounds were some place in the country and not right there at the time. K.O. wanted those dogs to be there so he shot this bear in the foot and it fell out of this tree not very far and landed right at my feet (chuckling) and was very much alive. Well...

Jerry: And not very happy.

Willard (Bill): Not very happy and I shot it with a .38 pistol, which didn't do too much good. These two hounds came running up and one of them bit me (laughing), chased the bear about a hundred yards, treed it again and K. O. shot it.

One of our other hunters was collecting a mountain lion for the Pendleton round up for the annual parade.

Jerry: A live mountain lion?

Willard (Bill): Yeah, a live mountain lion. And George Morrison carried his equipment in a basket – an Indian style basket. He trapped a lion in Polk County on Black Mountain, tied him up by the feet and put a muzzle on him and put it in his baskets. He had two miles to go back to his rig. He started down the mountain and all at once he had a foot on his one of his shoulders; a mountain lion foot. He got out of that basket right away. Well the lion was still tied up by his back feet and he couldn't go any place. But George said, "That was really a thrill to have those two feet on my shoulders and that lion behind me in the basket."

Jerry: So he was using a basket kind of Indian fashioned to transport it.

Willard (Bill): Yes. (Laughing) That lion was in the Pendleton Parade. We had a live bear and a live coyote in the same pick-up in one of the parades. The coyote got semi-loose and got up to the bear. The bear slapped him and knocked him out of the pick-up and right into a Jenny that had a colt with her. She killed that coyote right there in front of all those people in and watching that parade. Stomped on it, killed it. Yeah, one of the stories.

Willard (Bill): Early in my career I started out with a fellow named Harold Dobbin. He was an assistant district agent headquartered in Pendleton. He was a flyer as well as a horseback trapper. After he retired, he turned 100% against the Fish & Wildlife Service and against the Predator and Rodent Control Program. He and I showed up in several meetings together. He just gave us hell and halleluiahs. I would have to defend the program. And of course he said, "Well I had 30 years of experience in this outfit and I know we were doing wrong."

Jerry: So he turned into be an advocate for the animals.

Willard (Bill): Yes he did. And it was interesting to me because he worked together with a another fellow named Hart. Hart and Dobbins had a pocket gopher control program in Umatilla County, so he was killing pocket gophers. But his attitude was a real disappointment because we thought a lot of Harold.

Another time I was out with one of our hunters. We were using snares and we set them in the bear tunnels that they made through the brush. This bull elk, a five-point bull elk, went down this trail, got caught in the snare and was still there; he was fresh when we got there. Dave Con was the hunter. And what do you do with a bull elk in a snare? Well Dave cut a club out of a tree branch. The elk was madder then hops. And he got that bull elk right out on the end of that snare and hit him as hard as he could hit him right between the antlers; knocked him right down and

knocked him out. And so we tied him up while he was down on the ground, we tied his hind feet and his front feet.

Jerry: Like you would cow?

Willard (Bill): Yeah, with rope. And, and were going to take that snare off of him but he came to and tried to get up. Dave hit him again down he went. We took the snare off, he was still out, cut the ropes and headed for the pick-up. We had about 200 yards to go. So we took off as fast as we could, got in the pick-up and here came that bull elk after us. He trailed us right to where we'd been parked. We took off in the pick-up. If he had caught us I don't know what would have happened. But that was an interesting, interesting occasion. One I wouldn't want to repeat.

Jerry: I understand now that in your retirement you still go to elk camp every year; 88 years old and you're going to elk camp again?

Willard (Bill): Oh yeah! Yep, although the last coupled of years we've stayed in a Forest Service Cabin instead of tenting it.

Jerry: Do you get any blood on your hands?

Willard (Bill): Not last year; the year before, yes.

Jerry: How many are in your camp?

Willard (Bill): Eight, there are eight of us that go, including two former regional directors.

Jerry: Is there; what are the camp rules or are there any?

Willard (Bill): Very, very few. Everyone has to do their part though. The guys that do the cooking don't do the

dishes. We all cut wood, we all tend the fires, we all play cards, we all drink a little beer.

Jerry: And you all tell lies.

Willard (Bill): Yeah (laughing). Yeah.

Jerry: This concludes my oral history interview with Willard "Bill" Nelson. There's several Bill Nelson(s) in the Service; you go by Willard or that's how you sign your name but everybody calls you Bill.

Willard (Bill): Yeah I sign my name Willard. I knew W.O. Nelson who retired in Idaho.

Oral History

of
Willard E.
(Bill) Nelson

Tigard, Oregon

March 6, 2008

**Oral History Program
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
National Conservation Training Center
Shepherdstown, West Virginia**